

**GREATER LONDON ASSOCIATION OF  
TRADE UNION COUNCILS**

**A CELEBRATION OF  
THE 1888 BRYANT & MAY  
“MATCHGIRLS”  
STRIKE**

**SATURDAY 18 OCTOBER 2008**

**1.30 for 2.00 pm**

*food and refreshment will be available from 1.30 pm and the  
meeting will start promptly at 2.00 pm*

**TUC Congress House  
Great Russell Street  
London WC1B 3LS  
(nearest tube: Tottenham Court Road)**

**supported by Unite London & Eastern Region  
CWU London Region & SERTUC**

**All Welcome**

*further information from: [secretary@glatuc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@glatuc.org.uk)  
[www.glatuc.org.uk](http://www.glatuc.org.uk)*

# **CELEBRATION OF THE 1888 “MATCHGIRLS” STRIKE**

## **SATURDAY 18 OCTOBER 2008**

### **Speakers**

#### **LOUISE RAW**

*Louise is from a trade union background and began researching the matchwomen's strike ten years ago. Her findings completely change the way the strike, and the beginnings of the modern labour movement, are understood. She is writing a book about the women, due to be published in 2009.*

#### **PROFESSOR MARY DAVIS**

*Mary is Professor of Labour History at London Metropolitan University. Mary is actively involved in the Labour movement; is an executive committee member of her own union and an elected member of the TUC Women's Committee. She was a founder and initiator of the Charter for Women campaign.*

#### **TERESA McKAY**

*Teresa is the Regional Organiser for Women Race and Equalities for Unite the Union/T&G Section in Region 1 (South East and East Anglia)*

#### **CHRISTINE COATES**

*Christine is the Librarian of the TUC Library Collections at the London Metropolitan University which has created a website with original records from the strike.*

**In July 1888 fourteen hundred women and girls walked out on strike at the Bryant & May's factory in Bow, East London.**

**120 years ago Bryant & May were a leading manufacturer of matches, a commodity much in demand in Victorian Britain. This determined militant action by a female workforce became known as the “Matchgirls’ Strike”.**

**The demands of these female workers included the reinstatement of a fellow worker, higher wages, a proper dining room and the freedom to form a trade union. Working conditions at the match factory, the long hours and the materials used, caused the women to suffer severe occupational disease. The phosphorous used in match production, when ingested, produced a kind of bone cancer known as “phossy jaw”. The first signs of phossy jaw were often painful swellings along the side of the jaw, quickly developing into open abscesses as the phosphorous poison ate away the jawbone.**

**The strikers marched to the Houses of Parliament where they met MPs; they gained public support for their grievances. Public pressure and the falling price of Bryant & May's shares encouraged this bullying employer to meet the women's demands in full. By the end of July, the Union of Women Match Makers had been formed. The strike gave a massive boost to trade union organising in London and across the country.**

**Join us to celebrate this victory and learn the lessons for today!**